Report from Colorado Springs

May 2005

The Reitan family, after asking to deliver a letter to James Dobson or the "next in command," was arrested for trespassing Monday, May 2, as they crossed onto the property of Focus on the Family. Originally, plans were to distribute hundreds of letters written by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals and families who have been hurt by Dobson's rhetoric. But Focus on the Family shut down to keep LGBT individuals and families from entering.

The Reitan family, Phil, Jake, and Randi, read their letter to Dr. Dobson outside the Focus on the Family compound

Before the arrest, Randi Reitan, mother of Jacob Reitan, a young gay man and Youth Director for Soulforce, read a letter she had written to Dobson explaining how his rhetoric is hurting families like theirs. Randi stated, "There was never a moment we did not love or accept our dear son. But we struggled with how best to see the day Jake is loved, accepted, and understood by society. As parents and Christians, we felt called to work for justice for all in the gay community." The letter is available online at www.soulforce.org.

With his arms around both parents, Jacob stated, "This family is about love, my parents love me as I am, as God created me, and James Dobson is out to destroy loving families like mine!" As the family crossed onto the Focus on the Family property, police immediately handcuffed the Reitans, all of whom had tears in their eyes as they were led to the police van. Over 125 Soulforce volunteers, singing "Amazing Grace," stood by in support of the family who were released from custody a short time later.

The event was covered by six camera crews, the AP Wire service, newspapers from across Colorado, and four crews making documentaries that will include the Mayday event. The AP stories have appeared in more than 100 papers across the US and as far away as the *Hindu Daily News* in India.

Jake Reitan is led away

Personal Notes:

This MAYDAY weekend, the GLBTA community of Colorado made history with Soulforce when lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, couples, and families and their allies from throughout the Rocky Mountain region gathered at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs to claim the Soulforce principles of nonviolence and confront James Dobson's overheated rhetoric and hurtful misinformation against our community. One of my payoffs this weekend after so many months of hard work was witnessing a vision become reality—when between 800-1000 members of MY family (60%-70% of whom were from Colorado) reaffirmed their dignity and worth by rallying in front of and marching around the Focus on the Family compound. The incredible diversity of OUR family was breathtaking, but I was deeply moved by the number of young people who participated. The best antidote for the pain and suffering of our GLBT sisters and brothers was found in the HOPE that shone from the faces of these courageous, young women and men this weekend. Thank you, Soulforce, for planning, organizing, and staging this event. I'm sure you know how grateful we in Colorado are to you for all your tireless work on behalf of justice and full equality for our community.

–Chris Hubble

Chris Hubble and friends

The Dobson action gave witness to the fact that faithful people living their 'Yes' to God and all of God's children have far more power than we ever imagined possible. We were able to close down that major institution of hate and evil with just the threat of delivering letters from their victims!!! More power than we know!!!

–Phil Lawson

The Goal of Soulforce:

Freedom for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance.

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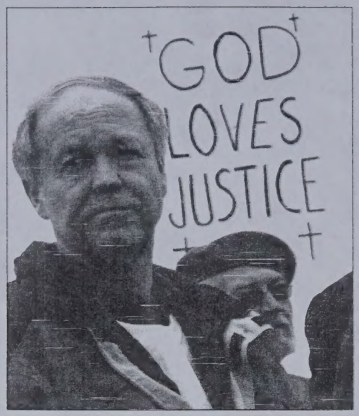


Chuck Phelan, newly elected Soulforce Board Chairperson

I was tremendously moved by the courage of Randi and Phil Reitan in attempting to deliver their message of love for their son to Dr. Dobson. I was saddened by the cowardice of Focus on the Family in closing its building to visitors and draping their logo in a tarp rather than receiving the Reitan letter.

– Chuck Phelan

We will never forget walking towards Focus on the Family, arm in arm, and looking at each of the beautiful faces in our Soulforce family as we walked past each person. The love that filled our hearts will be with us always.

– Randi Reitan

I was impressed by the amazing organizing done in Colorado. I think about 60-70% of those registering on our website were from Colorado. This is the strongest local support in Soulforce history. I was again touched by the power of 3 people being arrested as opposed to multitudes. In both DC and the Springs, that it was 3–here is the power of the Holy Spirit being manifested. *–Kara Speltz*

Kara Speltz directs the registration process at the MCC training session Saturday night

That picture of the Reitan family being arrested in front of James Dobson's massive Focus on the Family headquarters... that witness to heterosexual parents who love their gay son unconditionally... that media response carrying the message across the U.S. and around the world... just that picture was worth every dollar Soulforce spent on this amazing and productive journey to justice. *–Mel White*

Bill Carpenter and Erin Adriel prepare the coffins to hold the hundreds of letters from GLBT people and allies. These were carried in procession around the Focus compound after the rally.

The Focus event was a huge success, with over 1,000 LGBT people and allies attending the MAYDAY picnic and 125 folks witnessing the arrest of the Reitan family outside Focus on the Family. And this action showed that the nonviolent principles of resistance work for everyone, not just religious people. I think this is the beginning of Soulforce mobilizing more and more people to take to the streets and demand that this insidious persecution of LGBT people stop now! *–Bill Carpenter*

Jason and deMarco in concert Sunday evening at MCC

Each Soulforce action is unique and the Dobson action was no exception. I think that our response to Dobson's anti-gay rhetoric was perfect. The Reitan family was a great example of what a family should be. They moved everyone to tears when Randi read her personal letter to Dr. Dobson. Even the reporters were moved to tears and clearly understood the damage that Focus on the Family and Dobson are doing with their anti-gay rhetoric and untruths. *–Cris Elkins*

Kyle (2nd from right) founded the first Gay-Straight alliance at his high school in Colorado Springs. Kyle and his parents were celebrated at the Saturday-night relentless nonviolent resistance training.

The Dobson event allowed my family and I to bear witness to the truth Dobson refuses to see. It was an amazingly rewarding experience. How fortunate I am to have a family that loves and accepts me for who I am. For one day, Focus on the Family was forced to focus on a family that truly knows what it means to be a family. I hope they took our lesson to heart. *–Jake Reitan*

Growing up Baptist I was taught about the sins of commission and the sins of omission. From my perspective as a Christian, we assembled here to hold James Dobson and Focus on the Family accountable for committing serious moral offenses against GLBT people and for continually omitting the truth of the many happy gay families in America. We witnessed with our lives. The question that remains is how James Dobson and his many supporters will respond to what they have seen and heard. *–Jamie McDaniel*

Rev. Nori Rost
pastor, MCC Pikes' Peak

It takes more than a green canvas shroud to cover up James Dobson's shame and disgrace. Focus on the Family committed an act of unprovoked spiritual violence and injustice against the Reitan family, simply because they are not 'their' kind of family. How ironic and contradictory that the Flag of the United States of America waved majestically in the background, our national symbol of liberty and justice for all.
–Paul W. Dodd, Chaplain (Colonel), US Army (ret)

May 7, 2005

Dear Friends,

On Mayday, when we marched on Dobson's massive world headquarters, Soulforce took another step towards helping to **create a powerful nonviolent resistance** movement.

Fundamentalists like Dobson are using the imaginary "gay threat" to superimpose their values on the nation. We must resist. It isn't just GLBT people whose future is threatened. **The future of the nation is at stake**.

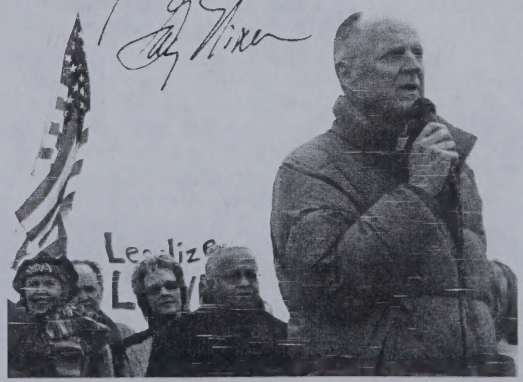
We can't compete with Dobson's **200-million** annual budget. So we must make our truth known in **creative ways** that will attract the media and awaken the nation. That's why we are determined that Soulforce will **'take it to the streets.'**

Thank you for being a part of this growing movement for change. Mayday cost Soulforce over $40,000, less than one full page ad in a major paper, but a lot of money for us. And we're going back to Dobson's headquarters in 2006.

Why don't you plan to join Soulforce on our journey to justice? **Stand with us** at a Local Soulforce Group vigil or at a national direct action.

Please make a contribution to help Soulforce continue our unique work at liberating GLBT people and bringing truth and justice to the nation. Whatever you can do, we are grateful.

Mel White
Gary Nixon
Co-Founders,
Soulforce Inc.



Jeff Lutes, Co-chair of the Dobson action, with partner Gary Stein and son Nikko

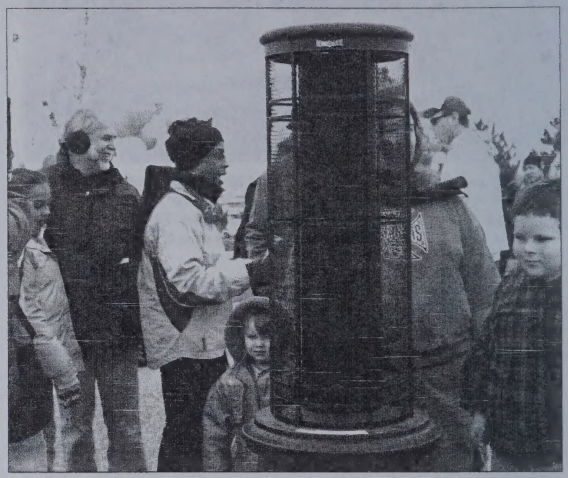
Our family was strengthened by the weekend in Colorado Springs and our 8-year-old son asked a million questions. We used it as an opportunity to teach him the values that are most important in our family: love for each other and for God, valuing the gifts of diverse people, and standing up for what you believe in. *—Jeff Lutes & Gary Stein*

The event was supported by many PFLAG chapters

Local Groups

As a result of the action in Colorado Springs, Soulforce MAYDAY participants have returned home inspired to start Soulforce local groups. In the midst of planning for the event, Denver residents Chris Hubble and Kate Burns created Soulforce Denver. Within twenty-four hours after the event, Colorado Springs participants inquired about starting a local group. Others from Kansas City and Los Angeles emailed wanting to know how to do the same! It is exciting to witness the transforming power nonviolent direct action has on the lives of people and their willingness to take it home and apply the principles where they live. Soulforce hopes to have local groups in every state across the nation mobilizing people to nonviolent direct action to end the discrimination and oppression against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Congratulations Soulforce Denver! Watch for more local groups to start soon. If you are interested in learning how to start a local group in your area, contact Karen@soulforce.org.

Love and commitment are traditional, American family values, and they are values our family cherishes as much as James Dobson does. We felt proud and empowered by standing with Soulforce at Focus on the Family, accepting that 'We vow to change the world through the expression of our love.' We toured Focus on the Family the following Tuesday, and simply held hands and shared our story of love and commitment with each person we encountered, from the people in our tour group, to Betty, our tour guide, and Cindy, Melissa Fryrear's assistant. *—Dotti Berry and Robynne Sapp*



Dani Newsum, former civil rights and labor attorney in the office of the Colorado Attorney General, gathers around the heater with other chilly justice-seekers

The events in Colorado Springs were sure to touch the hearts of any who truly know the meaning of family. The celebration of families on Sunday and the walk to the Focus on the Family complex on Monday captured both the joy and sorrow of true family life. I liken the closing of Focus on the Family to the closing of shops and businesses in the 1960s when integration became the 'law of the land.' James Dobson, like the white business owners of the 1960s, chose to close his doors rather than to welcome his brothers and sisters in Christ. *—Erin Adriel*

Looking ahead...

Opportunities to do justice with Soulforce

The Equality Ride

A seven-week bus tour in spring 2006 to challenge college policies that discriminate against GLBT students (see www.equalityride.com)

Return to Colorado Springs

summer 2006

Stay tuned to www.soulforce.org for more 2005 & 2006 "justice adventures!"

If you believe that our goals are worthy of your support, will you make a tax-deductible donation today? Make a pledge to support Soulforce monthly by cash or credit card through the mail or online (www.soulforce.org). Thank you!